

**Regulating Television Drama For Positive
Audience Impact**

By

Aishat Ayijimoh Onusi

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this study was carried out by AYIJIMOH AISHAT ONUSI in the Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

Marcel Okhaku, Ph.D

Department of Theatre Arts & Mass Communication

University Of Benin, Benin City

Project Supervisor

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my adorable children - **MASTURAH, RODIYAH, FADEELA** (born during the first semester of this programme) and my little baby **ZAHABIYA** (born while I was rounding up this project work). Dear Angels, you all endured the inconvenience of having a mother, pursuing a career and studying at the same time. I love you all dearly. Hugs and Kisses.

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ABSTRACT

This research work examines what the regulation of Television drama in Nigeria, as provided for in the Nigeria Broadcasting Code, seek to achieve. It also evaluates how these provisions have improved the standard of TV drama production. The first chapter traces the history of TV drama in Nigeria back in the early 1960s when Prof. Wole Soyinka unveiled My Father's Burden. Relevant literatures by scholars in broadcast regulation and TV drama are reviewed with examination of theories considered relevant to the subject matter; all contained in the second Chapter. The study covers a purposive sample of 75 respondents using the survey research method. Findings from the research show that Television drama serves as means of entertainment, education and agent of behavioural change for a significant number of TV drama viewers, thus underlining the essence of regulation for positive impact. Broadcast regulation as being performed by the National Broadcasting Commission has no doubt helped to protect TV drama audience from harmful content, we conclude from the findings of this research that there is more to be done to enlighten viewers on their roles as partners in regulation, strengthen positive socio-cultural values and promote the development of indigenous TV drama production through effective enforcement of the NBC's local content provisions.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.1.1 What is Television Drama?

Television drama is a fictional narrative material performed 'live' or pre-recorded and aired on TV. It is usually scripted and in the line of traditional drama ranging from short illustrative sketches to original, full-length scripts. The term covers various forms, though situation comedies, mysteries, soap operas, dramatic series, mini-series, family adventures, comedy sketches featuring recurring characters, docudramas and topical dramas are most popular.

Television Dramas have unique attributes and are different from drama on Radio and on stage. The following features distinguish TV Drama from stage and Radio drama:

Camerawork

In recording Television dramas, the dramatic story is told using the camera. The camera records units of events which are then strung together to tell a meaningful and aesthetic story. The units of recording come in shots. Shots are achieved through the following; long shots, medium shots, close-up shots, extreme long shots, pans, switches, tilts etc.

The different kinds of shots appearing in sequences of establishing shots followed by mid-shots of characters or reversed shots are used to show character interaction and in particular, close-ups to show the characters' emotions.

Music

Television Dramas employs music or sound to punctuate actions, create effects (suspense or tension) and underline emotional moments.

Storylines

All dramas tell stories but Television dramas tend to tell stories of familiar backgrounds. That is, stories focussing on common societal issues, with which the audience can easily relate. For example; TV dramas focus on issues such as family life, romance and betrayal, neighbourhood crime/ law and order, civic responsibility, societal ills and moral lessons etc.

TV DRAMAS IN FOCUS

This study will focus on some of the TV drama categories commonly found on Nigerian local TV stations. These include sitcoms, soap operas and made-for-TV-movies etc.

1. SITUATION COMEDY OR SITCOMS

According to answers.com's online resource, the *situation comedy*, also known as sitcom has become one of the most common and culturally significant types of television comedy drama. As the name implies, these dramas feature recurring comic characters placed in particular humorous situations and environments.

Thus, the environmental factors in each situation determine the shape and colour of events that are strung together to tell stories through the most comical but effective means, intended to create fun and also teach lessons.

The first television sitcom as contained as traced by Answers.com (2008:19) was *Pinwright's Progress*, broadcast on the BBC between 1946 and 1947. The early 1950s brought *I Love Lucy* to the screens in the US and *Hancock's Half Hour* in Britain. Sitcoms have always had a special

place in the hearts of viewers and gathered highly devoted followers, as the familiar characters often become beloved.

Often performed before a live audience (or, in some cases, a simulated live audience in the form of a laugh track), filmed or taped with a multiple-camera setup and almost always a half-hour in length, sitcoms are seldom presented as realistic depictions of life but often generate honest humour through the relationships between and ongoing development of characters. (Answers.com 2008:20)

In Nigeria, sitcoms were made popular by Adewale Adenuga's *Papa Ajasco and Company*, adapted from *Ikebe Super*, the defunct comic magazine. *Papa Ajasco and Company* is a 30 minute weekly TV series that syndicated on most TV stations across Nigeria. The hilarious sitcom often focuses on serious societal issues highlighted through drama in a comic manner.

Other good examples of situation comedy on Nigeria's local TV drama include *Clinic Matters* situated in a hospital environment; *Face to face* situated in a typical over crowded house, containing single rooms occupied by low income earning families, whose daily struggles for survival provide humour and thought provoking lessons.

2. SOAP OPERAS

A soap opera, sometimes called "soap" for short, is an ongoing, episodic work of dramatic fiction presented in serial format on Television or radio. The name *soap opera* stems from the original dramatic serial broadcast on radio that had soap manufacturers such as Procter & Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive and Lever Brothers as sponsors and producers. These early radio series were broadcast in weekday daytime slots when most listeners would be housewives; thus the shows were aimed at and consumed by a predominantly female audience.

Soap operas according to Wikipedia online resource began in the early 1930s as 15-minute radio episodes and continued on television from the early 1950s as 30-minute and later hour-long episodes. Usually broadcast during the day and aimed at housewives, they initially focused on middle-class family life, but by the 1970s their content had expanded to include a wider variety of characters and situations and a greater degree of sexual explicitness. In the 1980s similar series began to be aired at prime-time evening hours.

The first soap opera on network television, *Faraway Hill*, ran on the Dumont network in 1946 as an evening series. As had been the case in radio, however, the TV soap quickly settled into the daytime schedule. It was not until ABC introduced *Peyton Place* in 1964 that a serious attempt to return the soap to prime time was launched. Before the advent of the prime-time soap, most series episodes were totally self-contained, with little or no reference to events that had happened in previous episodes. Since then, most series have employed some continuing elements from episode to episode. (Answers.com 2008:23)

A crucial element that defines soap opera is the open-ended nature of the narrative, with stories spanning several episodes. The defining feature that makes a program a soap opera is that form of television drama that works with a continuous open narrative. Each episode ends with a promise that the storyline is to be continued in another episode.

Soap opera stories run concurrently, intersecting and leading into further developments. An individual episode of a soap opera will generally switch between several different concurrent story threads that may, at times, interconnect and affect one another or may run entirely independent of each other.

It usually runs weekly and lasts for an hour, has an ongoing, complex plot that emphasizes relationships and ends in a cliff-hanger each week. This

requires the audience to invest a lot of time in following the drama each week to get a full grasp of the story and because of this; soap needs to be captivating enough to hold its viewers till the end of the story.

Another main characteristic that define soap operas is:

An emphasis on family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, emotional and moral conflicts; some coverage of topical issues; set in familiar domestic interiors with only occasional excursions into new locations. (1985:127)

Fitting in with these characteristics, most soap operas follow the lives of a group of characters who live or work in a particular place, or focus on a large extended family. The storylines follow the day-to-day activities and personal relationships of these characters.

MADE-FOR-TV-MOVIES

Though not exactly labelled as such, there were early precedents for "television movies", such as the 1957 *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, based on the poem by Robert Browning, and starring Van Johnson, one of the first filmed "family musicals" made directly for television. (Wiki, 2009:30)

Most "family musicals" of the time, such as *Peter Pan*, were not filmed but broadcast live and preserved on kinescope, a process which is not precisely the same as film or even videotape. (Wiki, 2009:32)

The term "made-for-TV movie" was coined in the United States in the early 1960s as an incentive for movie audiences to stay home and watch what was promoted as the equivalent of a first-run theatrical motion picture.

The first of these made-for-TV movies is generally acknowledged to be *See How They Run*, which debuted on NBC on 7 October 1964. A previous film, *The Killers*, starring Lee Marvin and Ronald Reagan, was filmed as a

TV-movie, although NBC decided it was too violent for television and it was released theatrically instead. (Wiki, 2009:20)

In Nigeria, Television stations have come to increasingly rely on Home Movies content for entertainment and aired in place of made-for-tv-movies . This practice has presented some challenges for the Regulator. Some of these challenges are discussed in details in a later chapter of this work.

Made-for-TV-Movies also last about an hour or more and may have lots of action or lots of pure drama, but unlike the soap opera each episode tends to stand alone and the story ends in a single episode.

Unlike Sitcoms and Soaps which are usually sponsored, most TV stations in Nigeria dedicate free airtime to air TV movies at least once a week especially at weekends and during the family belt.

1.1.2 TV DRAMA IN NIGERIA; A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The development of television drama in Nigeria was basically inspired by the experience of writers and producers of radio features and dramas of the mid-fifties. Chief Segun Olusola, Veteran broadcaster recalled in Ogunbiyi:

But there were other agents at work in the dramatic arts and it was the coming together of these disparate activities that presaged the advent of television drama in 1960. (1981:371)

Prior to 1960, a very popular form of entertainment had prepared Nigerian TV Drama audience. It was the Hubert Ogunde's theatre Company which was already well established as far back as the early fifties. In addition to Ogunde's efforts, a close associate of his – Kola Ogunmola also carved a niche for himself in the history of TV drama in Nigeria when he took a bold step to initiate a travelling road show with a strong content of juju music.

In 1957, a group of working-class Nigerian drama enthusiasts in Lagos and Ibadan came together and formed what was known as 'Players of dawn'. This group produced dramatic presentations on monthly and quarterly bases.

Due to these early periodic entertainment forms which existed before television was introduced in 1959, the educated elites in the city centres of Lagos were already used to the once in a month amateur dramatic presentations at the British Council or the University College, Ibadan while the less educated working class urban dwellers looked forward to the quarterly season of Ogunde's theatre presentations or Ogunmola's travelling shows.

Ogunbiyi (1981) described these two groups of entertainment audience which constituted TV viewers of 1959 – 1960, as having inspired earliest Nigerian TV producers to conclude that audience expectations would include a measure of dramatic presentations.

In 1960, Wole Soyinka returned to the country and was set to launch the first ever professional theatre group. With the support of his colleagues in Radio, TV and the local amateur scene, who rallied round him, the first drama presentation on Nigerian Television *My Father's Burden* was aired 'live' in August, 1960. (1981:372).

Wole Soyinka's *My father's burden* was a very incisive criticism of the emerging Nigerian bourgeoisie bribing and corrupting its way through. The TV drama scored a number of firsts when it was televised. Apart from being the first TV drama in English Language on Nigerian Television, it was also the first ever commissioned Play on Nigerian TV. The live transmission of the drama, which was expectedly fraught with technical difficulties, also resulted in the first published review of a TV Play

captioned the 'WNTV's Burden' published in the Television Times and Radio News of August 18, 1960. (1981:372)

One major challenge of the early TV dramas was that they were usually televised 'live'. According to Segun Olusola in Ogunbiyi (1981:377), during the 'live' broadcast of My father's burden, actors were reported to have tripped over a web of electric cables resulting in power failure and actors' loss of lines but the show had to go on! Its rehearsals were often held at backyards of private homes!

One of the pioneer screen actors that helped shape Nigerian TV drama was Orlando Martins, the first professional actor to perform in a Nigerian TV drama in English and a long standing member of the Actors' Equity of Great Britain. He was aged 60 at the time.

The week-long African Festival of TV Drama organised to celebrate Nigeria's 5th year anniversary in 1965 also gave TV drama quite a boost. Among the productions featured during the Festival were Song of a Goat and Masquerade by J.P Clark and The Trials of Brother Jero by Wole Soyinka. The development of Nigeria's Television drama recorded a high point in 1968 with the inception of a regular drama series - The Village Headmaster, though the filming of the play did not occur till 1969.

The Festival of Arts and Culture tagged FESTAC, held in 1977 brought an end to the uncertainties and tentative experiments associated with the development period of Television drama in Nigeria. This was because, the coverage of FESTAC '77 demanded of TV producers additional skills required for the production of TV drama and other art programmes on TV. The festival gave rise to a significant improvement in the quality of TV drama productions.

The Nigerian Television Authority NTA played a pivotal role in creating a better appreciation of TV drama as a programme genre when in 1978, it organised the first NTA Festival of Drama. The Festival featured drama programme competition involving twelve TV stations with an hour long entry each. This eventually gave birth to the NTA sponsored TV drama series that ran on several TV stations across Nigeria. Such series included *The Village Headmaster*, *Winds Against My Soul*, *For Better for Worse*, *Case File*, *Masquerade*, *Hotel De Jordan*, *Cock Crow at Dawn* etc.

The early nineties ushered in an influx of cheap Mexican Soaps into the Nigerian TV market, a trend which gained so much popularity that indigenous production, began to suffer. The Mexican Soaps continued to reign to the detriment of independent TV Drama productions, since the typical Nigerian's perception is that 'foreign' products are better than locally made ones.

Femi Robinson, Veteran theatre practitioner, who also starred as 'Headmaster' in the TV series, *The Village Headmaster*, puts it this way.

For TV drama series, the independent producer had to look for a sponsor. TV stations were no longer interested in joint productions. Why should they spend a kobo on local production when they could have a copy of a foreign film bought for two hundred naira? With major companies feeling the high cost of sponsoring local productions, some of them opted for renting foreign films and airing them on our TV stations. Foreign films were imported and paid for in foreign currency while local producers had their works rotting away. *The Village Headmaster*, *Cock Crow at Dawn*, *Samanja* and *Masquerade* all went into oblivion because TV stations now found a good reason to refuse to pay for local productions. (Nigerian – Newspapers.com, March 1, 2008).

In 2001, *Super Story*, a brainchild of ace TV producer – Wale Adenuga, debuted on the Nigerian Television Authority – NTA Network Service. *Super Story* stormed the airwaves with the captivating and touching story

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